

Psalm 87

Morning Prayer Thursday Week 3

The psalmist delights in Jerusalem as having been founded by YHWH. Because YHWH has set up his abode there, Jerusalem is portrayed as the mother city of even traditional enemies, including Egypt, Babylon and Philistia, who will come to the city seeking YHWH. The title reads: 'Of the Korahites*. A Psalm*. A Song.

¹He has set it up on a holy mountain.

YHWH has founded Zion.

– Isaiah 14:32

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says YHWH, who has compassion on you. O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of jewels, and all your wall of precious stones.

– Isaiah 54:10-12

The city of YHWH of hosts, the city of our God. God has established it forever.

– Psalm 48:8

²YHWH prefers the gates of Zion to all the dwellings of Jacob.

God has chosen Jerusalem for a special mission to the world (see also verse 7).

³Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God.

Great is YHWH and most worthy of praise in the city of our God. His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, pinnacle of Zaphon, the city of the great King.

– Psalm 48:1-2

⁴I number Egypt and Babylon among those who recognise me; Philistines, people of Tyre and Cush are born there.'

Jerusalem is portrayed as a fruitful mother, including among her children nations traditionally considered enemies. In this extraordinarily 'catholic' verse they are numbered as citizens. 'Cush' is Ethiopia.

⁵And of Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one were born there'. The Most High himself has set it up.

Many nations shall join themselves to YHWH on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst.

– Zechariah 2:11

Aliens will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

– Isaiah 14:1

Foreigners join themselves to YHWH, to minister to him, to love the name of YHWH, and to be his servants.

– Isaiah 56:6

This is extraordinary in that other nations are seen not as enemies or subject peoples but as citizens, properly registered and with full rights.

In days to come the mountain of YHWH's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.

– Isaiah 2:2-3

I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory ... all flesh shall come to worship before me, says YHWH.

– Isaiah 66:18,23

The reputation of YHWH will spread throughout Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem, when peoples and kingdoms gather together to worship YHWH.

– Psalm 102:21-22

Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek YHWH of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of YHWH.

– Zechariah 8:22

The nearest text to this in the Old Testament scriptures is a late one speaking of the Egypt of the Ptolemies and Seleucid Assyria:

On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom YHWH of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.'

– Isaiah 19:23-25

This universality was realised on the day of Pentecost

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.

– Acts 2:9-11

'YHWH will write in the register of the peoples: 'This one was born there.'

Jerusalem in the providence of God

Paul expresses the universal scope of God's love in his letter of farewell to the Gentile churches of the East:

Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.

– Ephesians 2:12-19

⁷Dancing they will sing: 'You are the source of all that we are.'

These words are inscribed on the baptistery of John Lateran in Rome. We think of the spring of Ezekiel 47:1-12 coming from the right side of the temple, and so of the life-giving water pouring from the side of Jesus on the cross.

In that day a fountain shall come forth from the house of YHWH.

– Joel 3:18

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem.

– Zechariah 14:8

The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

– John 4:14

One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

– John 19:34